

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

END OF SESSION REPORT 2013-2014

Remit and Powers

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement, under Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Assembly Standing Order 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role in respect of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has power:

- to consider and advise on Departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- to approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- to call for persons and papers;
- to initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- to consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Membership

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson)
Mr Joe Byrne³ (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr Declan McAleer^{1,4}
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Robin Swann^{5,6}

Mrs Judith Cochrane^{9,10}
Mr William Irwin
Ms Michelle Mcilveen⁸
Mr Ian Milne^{2,7}

¹ With effect from 23 January 2012 Ms Michaela Boyle replaced Mr Conor Murphy

² With effect from 08 May 2012 Mr Chris Hazzard replaced Mr Willie Clarke

³ With effect from 19 May 2012 Mr Joe Byrne replaced Mrs Dolores Kelly as Deputy Chairperson

⁴ With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Declan McAleer replaced Ms Michaela Boyle

⁵ With effect from 03 December 2012 Mr Danny Kinahan replaced Mr Robin Swann

⁶ With effect from 21 January 2013 Mr Robin Swann replaced Mr Danny Kinahan

⁷ With effect from 15 April 2013 Mr Ian Milne replaced Mr Chris Hazzard

⁸ With effect from 16 September 2013 Miss Michelle McIlveen replaced Mr Trevor Clarke

⁹ With effect from 01 October 2013 Trevor Lunn replaced Mr Kieran McCarthy

¹⁰ With effect from 27 January 2014 Mrs Judith Cochrane replaced Mr Trevor Lunn

KEY ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

1. This report covers the work of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development during the 2013-14 parliamentary session of 2nd September 2013 to 4th July 2014.

PRIMARY LEGISLATION

The Reservoirs Bill

2. The Reservoirs Bill was introduced to the Assembly on the 20 January 2014 and passed to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on the 5 February 2014. The Committee published a public notice calling for evidence on the specific provisions of the Bill and held oral evidence sessions with 12 organisations as well as hearing from private sector owners at a specially organised event.
3. A number of key themes emerged from the evidence including issues around the risk designation process, concerns with the potential for over engineering and lack of oversight of engineers, lack of information on the condition and cost to bring reservoirs to an acceptable safety standard and the potential high cost of such repairs etc.
4. The Committee discussed its concerns with Departmental officials who subsequently brought amendments to the Committee. The Committee considered and in most instances agreed that the amendments addressed its concerns.
5. One major set of amendments included delaying considerable parts of the Bill until an initial audit of the condition of reservoirs in Northern Ireland had taken place. A financial assistance package would also be made available to reservoir owners and managers to enable this audit to take place. The Committee ordered its report into the Bill to be printed on 1st July 2014.

[Committee Report on the Reservoirs Bill](#)

SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

6. The Committee considered and scrutinised both Policy Proposals (SL1s) and Statutory Rules including approving 18 pieces of secondary legislation dealing with a wide range of topics from animal and plant health, organic farming, fishing and policies for payment of European funding schemes. One such piece of subordinate legislation was **The Gangmasters Licensing (Exclusions) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

7. The Gangmasters (Licensing) Act was introduced in 2004 to curb the activities of those gangmasters who exploit their workers and/or act illegally. The act is applicable to labour providers operating in agriculture, horticulture, the gathering of shellfish and the processing and packaging of agricultural, fish and shellfish produce. The Committee had a number of concerns about proposed amendments to the Act and took oral evidence from the Gangmaster Licensing Authority. After hearing about its activities and how it dealt with issues such as Gangmasters operating on cross border the Committee was content to agree the changes to the legislation.

[Hansard of evidence session on Gangmasters legislation](#)

8. **SR 2014/96 The Sea Fishing (Financial Assistance to Fishing Boats) Regulations (NI) 2014** – The Committee considered and agreed that it was content with this Statutory Rule which provided emergency assistance to fishermen because of the impacts of exceptionally bad weather which prevented boats setting to sea.

LEGISLATIVE CONSENT MOTIONS

9. During the course of this session the Committee considered one Legislative Consent Motion – The Public Bodies (Abolition for Food From Britain) Order 2014. The Committee considered papers on the proposal to abolish Food From Britain and the draft consent motion as laid in the Business Office. The papers considered by the Committee indicated that this Order would have a minimal impact in Northern Ireland and it therefore agreed that it was content for the Department to proceed in seeking the Assembly's consent to the Public Bodies (Abolition of Food From Britain) Order 2014. The motion was debated in the Assembly on 30 June 2014 and the Official Report of the debate can be found at the address below.

[Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Public Bodies Abolition for Food From Britain Order 2014](#)

INQUIRIES

10. The Committee undertook a thematic review into Farm Safety with the aim of considering what gaps remain to be addressed by DARD to enhance farm and farmer safety in Northern Ireland. The Committee commissioned research from the NI Assembly Research and Information Service, the Department, the Health and Safety Executive Farm Safety Partnership, the Ulster Farmers' Union and the NFU Mutual. Members also took the opportunity to receive a presentation and demonstration on farm safety from a farmer in a farm setting. The review culminated in a large scale Farm Safety event, hosted by the Committee, in Parliament buildings. The event included a simulation of a large animal rescue aided by the NI Fire and Rescue Service, a demonstration of the threat posed by PTO shafts, and a number of information points on farm safety issues. The event was closed with a testimony of a farmer who told of his traumatic experience in an on farm incident. The details of the review can be found at the link below;

[Committee Farm Safety Review](#)



BUDGET SCRUTINY

11. The Committee examined departmental budgets on five occasions during the parliamentary session. These sessions included scrutiny of the proposed Monitoring Rounds, the Outturn reports and updates. The Committee noted and approved the Departmental bids in the October 2013, January 2014 and June 2014 Monitoring Rounds. The Monitoring Round bids included increased compensation for Bovine TB and bids to fund some aspects of Going for Growth.

POLICY SCRUTINY

12. In the 2013 – 14 session, the Committee agreed to focus its policy scrutiny by undertaking thematic reviews of certain key policy areas as described below. As well as these thematic reviews the Committee undertook ongoing policy scrutiny of other areas such as progress on the DARD business plan, the proposed DARD HQ relocation to Ballykelly and PfG targets.

13. CAP Pillar 1 New Direct Payments Model – the Committee kept a close watching briefing on the revisions made by the EU to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is the single most important source of income for many farmers in Northern Ireland. The Committee undertook in-depth scrutiny of how the policy options arising from the revised Pillar 1 CAP would be implemented by DARD in Northern Ireland. It commissioned research papers, heard from DARD officials and key stakeholders and followed the consultation with the industry in detail. Particular attention was paid to specific policy issues such as details of what geographical areas would qualify as Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) and from which pillar would ANCs payment be made from, coupling schemes, regionalisation of Northern Ireland for payments, young farmer schemes etc. The Committee took an interest in and advised the Department on revised definition of “active farmer” and how this affected the Northern Ireland farming industry with a particular emphasis on the transfer of entitlements. The Committee noted concerns with the length of time that the Department took in coming to its final major decisions on the policy options and implementation of Pillar 1. The Committee noted that it was particularly concerned that lack of clarity on these major issues made decision making difficult for farming businesses.

[Hansard of Ministerial evidence session on CAP July 2014](#)

14. CAP Pillar 2 Rural Development Programme – The new Rural Development Programme and its budget proved to be politically sensitive. The Committee closely followed the consultation that DARD held in Northern Ireland. The Committee noted that it had its particular interest in following aspects of the new RDP
 - Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs)
 - Business Investment Scheme RDP linked to Going for Growth Farm Business Improvement Scheme and funding for Going for Growth
 - Leader approach / delivery framework.
 - Agri environment schemes.
 - Coupled schemes
 - Budget allocation overall and prioritisation within and to specific measures.

15. Single Farm Payments (SFP) 2013 and new LPIS Mapping – the Committee continued its ongoing scrutiny of the Single Farm Payments concentrating on the 2013 scheme. It focused on the roll out of the new mapping system - the land parcel identification system (LPIS) maps were used for the first time in 2013. This is a key control for ensuring accuracy of individual payments to farmers and should be an important tool in reducing the levels of disallowance (financial penalties) from the EU. The Committee also focused in the importance of paying farmers in a timely way and of how DARD could and should make improvements in that regard. Of particular concern for the Committee was a glitch in the use of remote sensing which, while it affected a small number of farmers, the farmers were from the same geographical area. The Committee held regular oral evidence session on these issues and receives regular written briefings.

16. The Committee also scrutinized the targets set by DARD for the 2014 Single Farm Payments and requested that the targets were made more challenging. DARD subsequently agreed to this request. The Committee noted, scrutinized and will continue to follow the progress made by DARD in preparing for the new Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) which will replace the SFP as a result of the revision to CAP.

[Hansard of Single Farm Payment evidence session October 2013](#)

[Hansard of Single Farm Payment evidence session May 2014](#)

17. Prices for Beef – the Committee noted with concern the change by the Northern Ireland beef processors in pricing policy and the impact this had on the beef farmers in Northern Ireland. It took evidence from the NI Meat Export Exporters (NIMEA) and the Northern Ireland Livestock Auctioneer Association (NILAA). It subsequently wrote to the major supermarkets and the Grocery Code Adjudicator making the replies it received available to key stakeholders. It organised and held an informal meeting with the Minister and the NILAA and issued a joint press statement confirming its position on the issue. The Chairperson also met with the Livestock Meat Commission on the issue.

[Joint Statement from Committee and DARD Minister on Beef Prices](#)

18. Bovine TB – while welcoming the fall in Bovine TB incidence rates, the Committee continued its scrutiny of how DARD is implementing the recommendations in its Committee Inquiry into the issue. It focused particularly on the issues of how DARD was implementing the TVR (trap, vaccinate, release) exercise of badgers and was critical of the length of time that it was taking to get the TVR exercise started. It took oral briefing on the TVR once it was started. The Committee also undertook field visits with DARD vets to see the practical and operational aspects of trapping, vaccinating and releasing badgers on the ground.

DEBATES

19. Tree Disease – the start of the 2013/14 session saw the Committee and the Assembly debate the work Committees' thematic review into tree disease from the previous session. Following the widely publicised outbreak of Chalara Fraxinea (Ash Dieback) the Committee decided to review the approach and policies of DARD and Forest Service on plant health and biosecurity with specific reference to tree disease. The findings of the review were debated in the Assembly and the Committee Position Paper can be found below.

[Hansard of the Committee Review of Tree Disease](#)

[Committee Position Paper on Tree Disease](#)

ENGAGEMENT

Events

20. ***Farm Safety Event, Parliament Buildings, 14th January 2014*** - The Committee organised this event to highlight the issue of Farm Safety and what can be done to reduce accident and mortality rates resulting from farm accidents. The details of this event and review can be found above at paragraph 8.
21. ***Reservoirs Bill, Private Owners Stakeholder Event, Room 115 Parliament Buildings, 18th March 2014*** – Following the introduction of the Reservoirs Bill, and the subsequent referral of the Bill to Committee stage, the Committee was concerned at the low level of knowledge and awareness by private owners of reservoirs of the proposed Bill. To address this issue the Committee invited private reservoir owners to an event in Parliament Buildings to discuss the proposed legislation and their concerns. The details of the event and a note of the main issues raised can be found at the link below.

[Reservoirs Bill Stakeholder Event](#)

Visits

22. ***National Ploughing Championships, Ratheniska, Co. Laois, 24 – 25 September 2013*** – The Committee visited the National Ploughing



Championships in Ratheniska, Republic of Ireland and took the opportunity to meet some of the 80+ businesses from Northern Ireland exhibiting at the event. The Committee also attended the DARD reception at the event for all NI Businesses that were present at the show.

- 23. Loughs Agency HQ, Magee Campus, Orchard House and Ballykelly, 3 October 2013** – As part of an NI Assembly Co-Ordinated visits to Derry-Londonderry to mark the city's year as the inaugural UK city of Culture, the Committee scheduled a visit to the Loughs Agency HQ, Orchard House, University of Ulster Magee and Shackleton Barracks Ballykelly. The Committee focused on the work of the Loughs Agency including a tour of its operations HQ, an informal lunch meeting with stakeholders and Magee Campus of the University of Ulster, the process system for Single Farm Payments at Orchard House and a tour of the site designated for the building of a new DARD HQ.



- 24. Northern Ireland Ploughing Championships, Dundarave Estate, Bushmills, Friday 18 October 2013** – The Committee visited the NI Ploughing Championships to support the local competitions and meet the organisers and competitors.



25. **Crosby Clelland Focus Farm, Greens Road Ballynahinch, Thursday 7 November 2013** – The Committee visited this Focus Farm to experience and tour the farm highlighting the areas relevant to the Farm Safety Partnership Slurry Animals Falls from height Equipment (SAFE) message.



26. **EFRA Committee, Westminster, London, Friday, 12 December 2013** – The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson travelled to London to meet with representatives of the EFRA Committee to discuss areas of mutual concern including CAP Reform, Bovine TB and Tree Disease as well as Food Security.

27. **AFBI Newforge, Newforge Lane, Belfast, Thursday 13 February 2014** – Members attended AFBI at Newforge Lane for a tour and overview of its work. The Committee heard details on the scientific work of both the Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division, and the Veterinary Sciences Division. Members received a tour of the Environmental Sciences and Aquatics laboratories and the Plant Health Building where they had discussions with students.



28. **CAFRE Greenmount Campus, Antrim, Thursday 20 March 2014** – The Committee visited CAFRE Greenmount Campus for a tour of its facilities which included the state of the art Dairy Center, the Beef and Sheep Center and the Horticulture Centre. Following this the Committee had the opportunity to discuss the programmes, the curriculum, life at CAFRE and future prospects with current students.



29. **Balmoral Show, Balmoral Park, Lisburn, Thursday, 15 May 2014** – The Committee attended the DARD breakfast at the Balmoral Show which included the main representatives from the Industry along with the Departments senior officials and the Minister.

30. Badger Test, Vaccinate or Remove Pilot Scheme, Co. Down, Wednesday 16 July 2014 and Monday 18 August 2014 – The Committee took up the opportunity to visit the pilot areas for the Test, Vaccinate or Remove scheme. The Committee had the opportunity to meet with the specialist team and view their work at first hand including the capture, inspection and vaccination of a wild badger.

31. The Priorities for the Next Session are :

- The Implementation of the new Common Agricultural Policy including the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020
- Review of the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme
- Implementation of the “Going for Growth” strategy

Committee Expenditure

32. Details of Committee expenditure for the session are contained at Appendix A.

Contact Details

33. Anyone wishing to contact the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development should do so at the following addresses:

The Clerk to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development
Room 244
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX
Email: committee.agriculture@niassembly.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
Committee Expenditure for Parliamentary Session 2013 – 2014

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Ploughing Championships, Ratheniska Co. Louth – To meet with local businesses represented at the Championships and DARDs event to publicise NI produce; • Loughs Agency HQ, University of Ulster Magee Campus, Orchard House and Ballykelly– Visiting a number of DARD outposts and location of the new HQ as part of the City of Culture event; • Northern Ireland Ploughing Championships – Visiting the local ploughing Championships to support the industry; • Crosby Clelland Focus Farm – An practical onsite visit as part of the Committee review into farm safety; • EFRA Committee – To highlight the concerns the Committee have about important issues to the representatives of the EFRA Committee; & • AFBI Newforge – A tour of the facilities at AFBI to see how they apply their sciences in the field; • CAFRE Greenmount – A tour of the campus to make the Committee aware of the facilities and curriculum to the next generation of farmers. • Balmoral Show – The Committee attended the main Agricultural Show in Northern Ireland. • Test and Vaccinate or Remove Pilot Scheme – The Committee took the opportunity to see the work of this scheme at first hand. 	£1,920.02
Printing of Committee reports	Includes the cost of Committee reports on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservoirs Bill 	£2,187.43

General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire and witness expenses	£2,958.54
Total		£6,968.20